

Do Away With Elections? The Rituals of “Democracy”

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Theme: [History](#), [Religion](#)

Do away with elections? To even think such a thought is treasonous. An election, or should I say a presidential election, is one of the few occasions, or should I say the only occasion, on which we take a genuine interest in government. We are spectators at a sporting event, a mix of a bullfight, prizefight and a barroom brawl. We get into heated arguments about which team is “better” about who deserves to win, about which gladiator will be the best for the country. There is an uppercut, a right cross, a roundhouse and he or she (not too often) is down for the count. No, he is not out. He is on his knees, struggling to his feet. The crowd roars.

Or maybe we should think of it like Super Bowl Sunday. The entire nation is brought together around one event. There is salsa and chips. The beer flows. There are roars of approval as ones team scores, long faces and silence when the other team scores. And for a week or two after the game there are long and intricate discussions of why the victor won and the loser obviously should have lost.

Benjamin Barber — Strong Democracy — has a different take. He contrasts the conversational, communitarian, celebratory elements of the democratic process with the act of voting, which he compares to using a public toilet. “We wait in line with a crowd in order to close ourselves up in a compartment where we can relieve ourselves in solitude and privacy of our burden, pull a lever, and then, yielding to the next in line, go silently home.” Russell Brand — Revolution — is more succinct. Voting is referred to as “the infertile dry hump of gestural democracy.”

And yet the right to vote — to stand out in the cold and rain in the dark of night for hours and then learn that the machine isn’t working — is considered a sacred right. It is enshrined in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). “The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections.” It is a right that was hard won.

A Right That Was Hard Won

In the United States, women were denied the #righttovote until 1920 when the 19th amendment to the Constitution was passed. Women began agitating for equal rights in the 1840s. The right to vote took on a life of its own. Its supporters were actively involved in the anti-slavery movement. In 1872, Susan B. Anthony was arrested for #voting and, after a much publicized trial, was found guilty. In 1917 over 200 supporters of the National Woman’s Party were arrested while picketing the White House. Some went on a hunger strike while in prison and were force-fed.

In Britain the struggle was even fiercer. Under the leadership of the Women’s Social and

Political Union women went on hunger strikes, chained themselves to railings to provoke an arrest, poured chemicals into mailboxes, broke windows in prominent buildings and set fire to unoccupied buildings and occasionally detonated bombs. Like their sisters in the United States they were imprisoned under harsh conditions and force-fed while on hunger strikes. In 1928 the Conservative government passed the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act giving the vote to all women over the age of 21.

The 15th amendment to the United States Constitution, ratified in 1870, prohibits the federal and state governments from denying a citizen the right to vote based on that citizen's "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Yet most black voters in the South were effectively disenfranchised. There were new state laws requiring poll taxes. There were discriminatory literacy tests, from which white voters were exempt. A system of whites-only primaries and violent intimidation by white groups also suppressed black participation.

A voters' registration campaign was launched in Selma, Alabama. Faced with stiff opposition the local blacks called in SNCC (Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee). Next to arrive was Dr. Martin Luther King and members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Protests ensued. By the end of February 1965, 3,000 had been arrested. Deacon and activist Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot and killed by a state trooper, spurring further outrage.

There were three marches from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama (the state's capital), a distance of about fifty miles. The first march of 600 people was nicknamed "Bloody Sunday" after marchers were beaten with billy clubs and tear-gassed by state troopers and a local posse. One woman was beaten unconscious. The second march resulted in a stand off between troopers and marchers. King returned to the church. He was going to seek federal protection for the marchers. That evening a white group beat and murdered civil rights activist James Reeb. The third march proceeded under the protection of 2,000 soldiers of the U.S. Army and 1,900 members of the Alabama National Guard under federal command.

On March 25, 25,000 people entered the capital city in support of voting rights for blacks. On August 6, The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed. It provided for federal oversight of elections in discriminatory jurisdictions, banned literacy tests and similar discriminatory devices, and created legal remedies for people affected by voting discrimination.

Voting in the East

Voting took on special importance in the East, as well. India, a country with an area of well over one millions square miles, peppered with hundreds of thousands of small villages, hidden in jungles, mountains and countryside, held its first general election in 1952 (See Guha, chapter 7). Starting from scratch it had to register 176 million Indians aged twenty-one or more, of whom about 85% could not read or write.

Some 224,000 polling booths were constructed and equipped with 2 million steel ballot boxes, using 8,200 tons of steel. 16,500 clerks were employed to type and collate electorate rolls, requiring about 380,000 reams of paper. One booth in the jungle reported more than 70% voting. A 110-year old man in Madurai propped up on either side by a great-grandson came to vote, as did a ninety-five-year-old woman, hunchbacked and deaf. In remote tribal areas people walked for days through wild jungles to reach their voting booth.

Faced with such spirit and courage and persistence how can one possibly bring into question the role of voting in our societies? Without question the struggle for voting rights was a

noble struggle and its achievements go beyond simply casting a ballot. Organizing themselves and vigorously fighting for a political goal gave women and blacks a social and political presence that had been denied them for centuries. In India it was the proudest moment of citizenship for a people in shackles for centuries.

The struggle waged to win the vote set examples for those who wish to engage in political struggle, regardless of the cause. But the vote itself, what it literally meant, what it produced, who it benefited, what its value was to society in political and social terms was not submitted to careful study. And so it is conceivable that many of those who risked their lives to gain the right might now question the wisdom of relying upon such a system for selecting those who govern. Says Russell Brand of suffragette Emily Davison, she “would not be urging the disempowered people of today to vote; she’d be urging them to riot.”

To argue against elections is to examine critically the electoral process itself and to consider in broad terms the kind of world our elected representatives have bequeathed to us. For I believe that much that is troubling about the world we live in can be traced directly to those who govern in our name. And it is the electoral process that has given them the right to do so.

Malfeasance and the Betrayal of Public Trust

OUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES HAVE VIOLATED THE CONSTITUTION THEY HAVE SWORN TO DEFEND

Without reading the bill, our elected representatives enacted the “Patriot Act of 2001,” thus laying the foundation for a fascist state. Only one senator, Russell Feingold (D-Wis.), voted against it. The bill —342 pages long — was introduced on October 23 and voted on the following day. By a vote of 357-66 it passed the House of Representatives.

The Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects the “right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures.” The “Patriot Act” undoes that constitutional protection.

On December 31, President Barak Obama signed the “The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)” for fiscal year 2012. Subsections 1021-1022 of Title X, Subtitle D, entitled “Counter-Terrorism” authorize the indefinite military detention of persons the President suspects of involvement in terrorism, including U.S. citizens arrested on American soil. Each year congress re-authorizes the NDAA with the “Counter-Terrorism” provision left intact.

The Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution contain a due process clause. Due process clause acts as a safeguard from arbitrary denial of life, liberty, or property by the Government outside the sanction of law. The NDAA does away with that constitutional protection.

OUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES IGNORE THE COMMON GOOD IN FAVOR OF CORPORATE INTERESTS THAT THREATEN OUR ECOSYSTEM, OUR PERSONAL HEALTH AND THE VERY SURVIVAL OF THE SPECIES

Section 735 of the HR 933 continuing resolution, passed in March, 2013, and signed by President Barack Obama, stripped federal courts of the authority to halt the sale and propagation of genetically modified seeds and crops even if safety tests reveal concerns about their harmful effects.

In 2009, \$250 billion was spent on drugs in the United States. Over the 10 years ending in 2012, the 11 largest drug companies took \$711.4 billion in profits, \$85 billion in 2012, alone.

Medicare is the largest purchaser in the world's largest drug market. Thanks to "The Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act (also called the Medicare Modernization Act or MMA)", enacted in 2003, by our elected representatives, Medicare was prohibited by law from seeking better prices for the drugs its subscribers needed to stay healthy and alive. Hence, drug dealers charged Americans — elderly Americans — vastly more for the same drug than they charged in other countries. Why? Because our elected representatives said they could.

Our Planet is in ecological free fall. Where will it stop? When will it stop? Is it too late? There is not an issue that is more critical to our survival. We count on our elected representatives to do everything they can to reverse some very dangerous trends. And what do they do? They undo what little safeguards we have and support policies that are designed to make matters many times worse.

The House of Representatives averaged more than one anti-environmental vote for every day the House was in session in 2011. More than one in five of the legislative roll call votes taken in 2011 - 22% - were votes to undermine environmental protections.

The anti-environment votes cut across a broad array of issues and included 27 votes to block action to address climate change, 77 votes to undermine "Clean Air Act" protections, 28 votes to undermine "Clean Water Act" protections, and 47 votes to weaken protection of public land and coastal waters.

Here is just a small sample of bills passed by the House of Representatives in 2011:

- House Continuing Resolution 34: Drastically cuts funding for environmental protection programs at EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), DOE (Department of Energy), DOI (Department of Interior), and other agencies and eliminates incentives for renewable energy.
- House Resolution 1, Full Year 2011: Blocks agency actions under the "Clean Air Act," the "Clean Water Act," and other laws and cuts funding for dozens of environmental protection programs at EPA, DOE, DOI, and other agencies.
- House Resolution 1, Full Year 2011: Blocks EPA greenhouse gas regulations for major emitters.
- House Resolution. 1, Full Year 2011: Blocks the Klamath Dam Removal and Sedimentation Study necessary to protect endangered species
- House Resolution 1, Full Year 2011: Blocks new EPA water quality standards for Florida waterways
- House Resolution 1, Full Year 2011: Prevents NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) from establishing a Climate Service.
- House Resolution 1, Full Year 2011: Blocks the United States from contributing funds to the "Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change"
- House Resolution 1, Full Year 2011: Blocks EPA from revoking "Clean Water Act" permits based on adverse effects on water, fish, and wildlife

IF THIS IS WHAT ELECTIONS ARE GETTING US WE NEED TO DO AWAY WITH ELECTIONS, AND SOON. AS EMMA GOLDMAN POINTED OUT, "IF VOTING CHANGED ANYTHING, THEY'D MAKE

IT ILLEGAL.”

Bailouts and sellouts

Certainly one of the most egregious acts of malfeasance by this or any government was what has been euphemistically called the bailout of banks too big to fail. Trillions of dollars were and continue to be transferred to banks to replenish funds that were lost to bad bets. The “Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008” is a law enacted in response to the subprime mortgage crisis. It authorizes the United States Secretary of the Treasury to spend up to \$700 billion to purchase distressed assets, especially mortgage-backed securities, and supply cash directly to banks. The real costs could be in the trillions, that is trillions of dollars of taxpayer money handed over to banks by our elected representatives. While banks were knee deep in dollars, residents of California who defaulted on their mortgages were reduced to sleeping in tents.

The scam continues. Now it is called “Quantitative Easing” (read: handout). To carry out QE central banks create money by buying securities, such as government bonds, from banks, with electronic cash that did not exist before. The new money swells the size of bank reserves in the economy by the quantity of assets purchased—hence “quantitative” easing — currently at the rate of \$75 billion a quarter.

Taxpayers could be doing plenty of more productive things with their money. The billions could be used to stop layoffs of teachers and firefighters, train laid-off workers for new jobs, or hire people to fix our ailing infrastructure. But taxpayers don’t get to make these decisions. They also don’t get bailed out when the value of their home suddenly plummets, or when they lose their job or retirement funds in an economic maelstrom they did not cause.

The buying and selling of stock by corporate insiders who have access to non-public information that could affect the stock price can be a criminal offense, just ask hedge fund manager Raj Rajaratnam who recently got 11 years in prison for doing it. But, congressional lawmakers who write the laws the rest of us have to live with, scaled the code to give themselves a pass on insider trading. Unsurprisingly, our elected representatives enjoy a substantially higher return on their stock investments than we do.

Such blatant self-serving exceptionalism could easily induce nausea if not outrage among a citizenry who have to follow the rules as they struggle to make a living. These are our elected representatives, the ones we put in place every time we vote, men and women without a shred of integrity.

This very brief summary of disrespect for the electorate and its vital necessities is but the summit of a mighty mountain of malfeasance and betrayal, most of which is hidden from the public eye. I almost forgot to mention the wars, covert wars around the world, overt wars like the wars in Libya, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, wars that never happen, that are never declared, that never end, wars that divert vital resources from our society, wars that kill millions, displace millions, obliterate infrastructure, decimate economies and cultures, wars that the vast majority of us oppose, wars that are bankrolled by our elected representatives to the tune of trillions of dollars a year.

Have we had enough, yet?

Faulty Electoral System:

Vote Fraud and the Two Party System.

Assuming that there are those stubborn few who want to vote despite all of the above, it is certainly reasonable for voters to believe that when they vote the electoral system itself is reasonably reliable and honest, that there is no tilt, that the system isn't rigged. This belief is a critical factor in establishing the legitimacy of our government and in gaining our allegiance.

In his book, *The Ruling Class* (1939), Gaetano Mosca, an Italian political scientist, offers some critical insights into the electoral process, insights that are as relevant today as they were when penned some seventy-five years ago.

The fact that a people participates in electoral assemblies does not mean that it directs the government or that the class that is governed chooses its governors. It means merely that when the electoral function operates under favorable social conditions it is a tool by which certain political forces are enabled to control and limit the activity of other political forces.

In other words, it seems as if we choose and control, but we don't. As Mosca points out, the deck is always stacked. "When we say that the voters 'choose' their representative, we are using a language that is very inexact. The truth is that the representative has himself elected by the voters ... *that his friends have him elected*" (italics in the original). We end up voting for those who are preselected by virtue of their "moral, intellectual and material means to force their will upon others, take the lead over the others and command them."

Thus, in practice, in popular elections, freedom of choice, "though complete theoretically, necessarily becomes null, not to say ludicrous." The voter, for his vote to have meaning, ends up having to choose from among a very small number of contenders, the two or three who have a chance of succeeding, "and the only ones who have any chance of succeeding are those whose candidacies are championed by groups, by committees, *by organized minorities*" (italics in the original).

The relative handful who are selected to speak for the citizenry are rarely, if ever, a random selection. They are rarely, if ever, demographically representative of the population at large. And they are rarely, if ever, open to the wishes of their constituency. Instead, those selected to speak for the citizenry speak not for their constituency but for the organized minorities who put them in power, minorities with certain values in common, "based on considerations of property and taxation, on common material interests, on ties of family, class, religion, sect or political party."

Thus, the preselected minority speaks for an even narrower minority who sponsored their candidacy based on a specific set of goals at odds with the needs and wishes of the vast majority. Mosca was writing in the 1930s. What would he say if he knew that it now takes millions of dollars to get elected to the House of Representatives, tens of millions to be elected senator or governor, and close to a billion to be elected president and that the much revered and martyred JFK sent bags full of money to capture the West Virginia primary in 1963 (See Anthony Summers below)? He would probably say, "I told you so."

And if you are bold enough and fool hardy enough to try and run for higher office on an independent ticket you will be confronted with endless legal hurdles placed there by the two

major parties that control the electoral process. You will be denied access to televised debates. You will be sidelined in every way conceivable, as was the case with Ralph Nader, or the powers that be will threaten to kill your children if you don't drop out, as was the case with Ross Perrot.

It was Joseph Stalin who said that it is not who votes that counts but who counts the votes. "Well," you say, "that was the Soviet Union. This is the United States of America." True, but the difference isn't as great as you think. Recall the 2000 presidential election, where there was obvious vote fraud in the state of Florida and a Supreme Court judge denied the citizens of Florida the right to a recount.

And yet we still believe in elections. Says David Van Reybrouck, in *Against Elections*, "It seems like we have all become electoral fundamentalists. We look down on those who have been elected, but worship elections themselves." We are disappointed again and again and yet keep coming back for more. We have equated elections with #democracy. Yet when the many select the few at election time, the outcome is #oligarchy by definition.

Elections are out of date, passé, outmoded like the stagecoach and the spinning wheel. They need to be consigned to the dustbin of history. As Reybrouck observes, "The citizen is neither a customer nor a child....The relationship between the government and its constituency is no longer that between a parent and its children, but of adults working together." If that is the case then we need to institute a form of government where we are "adults working together." We adults can certainly do a better job than those who are currently in charge. And not only are elections an obstacle to social justice, they are fraudulent to boot.

Votescam and the Little Black Box

In a little known book entitled, *Votescam* (1996), two brothers, James and Kenneth Collier, undertake to investigate the voting system at an elemental level. Who manufactures the computers and develops the software that collect and transmit the voting data and how are these technical people connected to the politicians running for office? Where there are physical ballots to be counted, who actually does the counting and what is the oversight process? The story begins with the 1988 Republican Primary in New Hampshire and ends in Florida where the brothers run into a stonewall of denial and indifference by government officials and the media as they uncover evidence of vote fraud on a grand scale.

As the Collier brothers tell it, shortly after the JFK assassination the CIA approached the major news agencies — at that time, AP, UPI, CBS, NBC, ABC and CNN — with a deal. You keep your nose out of the assassination and we will give you control over Election Day results.

In other words, the Election Day results were placed in the hands of the major networks, private enterprises, whose primary purpose is entertainment and misinformation. The final election results as reported to the public are not filtered through some government agency, certified as final and valid, and then passed onto the networks. It is the networks themselves that are doing their own certifying. At the time *Votescam* was written, they operated under the aegis "News Election Service (NES)". They had actual physical control of the counting and dissemination of the vote and refused to let the public in on how it all worked.

The ballots themselves are counted, manually or mechanically. Then the totals are recorded on canvas sheets and signed by precinct workers. These raw data are fed into a computer that stores the information and is the source for the tallies that are passed along to us, via the media. Suppose someone wanted to fix the results, what might that look like?

Pollsters go around knocking on doors asking people how they expect to vote. On Election Day they query voters after they have voted and use that as a basis for predicting outcomes. Gallup and Harris are two of the better-known agencies in the United States. They are respected for their integrity and accuracy. Although polls might serve to discourage voters from voting, they have a positive function to play. They are a check against the results that the media feeds us.

For example, in the 1988 Republican primary for President, George H.W. Bush was pitted against Bob Dole. Going into the balloting, polls had Bush losing by eight points. Instead he won by nine. How could the polls be off by a seventeen-point spread?

Bush had promised his campaign manager, John Sununu, Governor of New Hampshire, a computer genius, that if he could “deliver,” he, Sununu, would become White House Chief Staff. Apparently he delivered. Bush won the primary, became President and Sununu got the reward he had been promised.

The Collier brothers decided to turn their investigation of electoral flaws and fixes into a book and were determined to follow a lead wherever it took them. They decided that brother Ken would enter the fray by running for Congress in Miami-Dade County. They were determined to do a low budget, activist, grass roots campaign, with the primary purpose of getting an inside look at how the system worked.

They were bold, took chances, and came up with some interesting facts. On Election Day they watched the results come in over television. They noticed that the computer went down and that when it came back on their tally came back lower than it had been. They discovered that there was a pattern around the country of computers “going down” and coming back up with different results.

They learned that at 7AM a precinct captain opens the back of the voting machine to determine that all counters are set to zero. At the end of the day when the voting is over, the back of the machine is opened again to read the tallies for each candidate. Representatives from each party call out the numbers to precinct workers who then enter them on canvas sheets and affix their signature. The Collier brothers tracked down the canvas sheets for the election they were in and discovered that there were two, not one set of sheets, and that the second set had 4,000 signatures that were forged.

Predicting the vote

Apparently Channel 7 was able to accurately predict forty races with 250 candidates by examining the results from just one voting machine. And they did it in just twenty-four minutes. Channel 4 achieved the same result in just four minutes. How is that possible?

The Collier brothers decided to study other subsequent elections results in Dade county. In the 1970 race for Governor 141,000 votes were cast. If we are to believe the numbers, the exact same number of votes were cast a month later in a runoff. But, that is not likely, since when the losing candidates drop out the vote count drops as well.

For the 1970 race for the House of Representatives, it was projected that there would be a total of 96,499 votes. And, in fact, the actual total was 96,499. The computer appears to have achieved a perfect result. This level of accuracy was replicated in five different races, one for governor, one for senator, three for the House of Representatives. Does that ever happen? What are the odds?

The Collier brothers tracked down a warehouse in Opa Locka, Florida, a rural backwater municipality where Dade county's 1,648 voting machines were stored when not in use. They came with a court order to examine the machines. The fellow in charge was friendly and talkative. How can you rig these machines? "Well," said Frank, "you can place a decal over the counter that reads '000,' when behind those zeroes is the real number 090. Or you can take a razor blade and shave one of these plastic wheels, which then slips ahead by 100 or 200 votes." Now the brothers had further evidence that the elections were open to tampering.

The "League of Women Voters" is known as a non-partisan civic organization. It was founded in 1920, shortly after women had won the right to vote. Its mission is to aid in voter registration, and educate citizens as to their voting rights. At the time, the League sponsored Presidential debates. It no longer does.

According to Ken and Jim Collier, the League also engages in vote fraud. An informant told the brothers that members of the League were "using little black pencils issued by the election division to punch out new holes in the vote cards" thus creating a new vote or invalidating an existing vote. The League workers were being paid \$15 per hour for their services. Yet state and federal law explicitly prohibit any "handling or piercing of the public's ballots by anyone except the voter."

The brothers arrived with their video camera and taped the League in action. Indeed the workers were pushing pencils through ballot cards. The floor was covered with chads. They got it on tape. It turns out that the League of Women Voters is at the center of Election Day counting and reporting. Not only do they handle the ballots, in violation of state and federal election law, they actually do the vote reporting. It is the League that supplies the numbers that are then supplied to the public by TV networks.

The Colliers also taped the automatic card counters — ballot multiplexers — in action. Workers would take cards that had already been scanned and scan them again. One vote was thus counted twice. Ballots arrive at the counting center in metal security boxes with intact red security seals. Except some of the seals were broken. One of the workers had a bag filled with new seals. In other words, the box had been tampered with. Yet it would end up with an intact seal at the end of its travels.

According to Jim and Ken Collier, the Miami election supervisor gave the ballots to precinct captains to take home as much as a week in advance of any election. Apparently a good time was had by all punching out a slate of candidates.

Conspiracy of silence

As the Colliers delved deeper into vote tampering and tried to get the news media to report what they had discovered they were repeatedly turned away. There was a conspiracy of silence. As Tim O'Brien of ABC news said to Ken and Jim, "When you're dealing with the networks, you're dealing with a shadow government."

Various conspiracies seem to feed off of each other. Katherine Graham was owner of the Washington Post, one of the nation's most prominent newspapers at the time Richard Nixon was President. She also owned a television station in Miami. Nixon had proof that Graham's TV station was involved in election rigging. Graham learned that Nixon was on her trail and decided that she would undo him before he got to her, hence, according to the Colliers, the Watergate bugging, a federal offense. The FBI and the telephone company had each done three sweeps and discovered that there were no bugs in the DNC headquarters in the Watergate. The Washington Post, Graham's paper, printed the story anyway, resulting in Nixon's impeachment, all of which was ignited by Graham's election shenanigans in her Miami TV station.

In 1964, Louis Harris developed a method for conducting exit polls that would permit pollsters to predict election results before the vote was counted. The networks — ABC, NBC, CBS and CNN — got together and formed another consortium, this time to conduct their own exit polls. At the time of the 1992 primaries, the Colliers once again did their homework and calculated that it would be impossible for the pollsters to achieve the results they claimed they had and for the networks to be offering numbers that were legitimate.

"Since VRS [Voter Research and Surveys] claims that thousands of people were polled in seven states, our math indicates that it was impossible to garner and call that much information back to Chilton Operators [Chilton Research of Radnor PA] and have the results on air at 7:01PM." (italics in original)

Elections are open to fraud at every step in the process from the counters in the back of the machines that can be covered with decals, the wheel that can be shaved, the canvas tally sheets that can arrive with forged signatures, the League workers who punch holes in ballots and call in the vote, the computer software whose source code is known only to the private company that owns it, the polls producing a level of speed and accuracy that is not humanly possible, that read out sheets handed to TV announcers. All of this is in private hands, subject to the whim of he or she who has the power necessary to dictate the outcome. We, the voters, naively return to the polls again and again participating in a process that has nothing to do with the will of the people whom it is allegedly designed to serve.

On some level we have known for some time that we were being scammed but had no proof and more importantly felt there was nothing we could do to bring about change. And so we participate in a meaningless ritual whose outcome is predetermined, thus validating a system whose sole purpose is to lull us into acquiescence so we will endure the hardships and harshness of the "American Dream." We are not happy but pretend to be and get angry if anyone suggests that something about our government is foul and needs to be changed.

Quality of Life: Social Decay

We live with the illusion that what our government does in our name is something separate and apart, does not enter into our private lives, penetrate our very souls. And yet it does. In his Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness, written at the end of the eighteenth century, English political philosopher William Godwin argues that we need to consider that "politics and modes of government will educate and infect us all."

According to Godwin, government conduct has intellectual, moral, psychological, and

emotional consequences for its citizens—that it, in effect, shapes us and “perhaps it insinuates itself into our personal dispositions, and insensibly communicates its own spirit to our private transactions.” What we consider to be our political education is, in effect, “the modification our ideas received from the form of government under which we live.”

Corrupt governors lead to corruption of the governed. There is a trickle down effect. As de Tocqueville observes, “they [the governors] in some measure lend the authority of the government to the base practices of which they are accused.”

For example, here in New York, we lost St. Vincent’s hospital — one of our finest — to venality and corruption. Ten executives were paid \$10 million per year in wages, enjoyed a \$278,000 golf outing. In the two years before closing, the hospital paid \$17 million for “management consultants,” \$3.8 million on “professional fund-raising” and \$104 million on unspecified costs. The hospital slid into bankruptcy with an accumulated debt of \$1billion, apparently after taking on debt from other hospitals as well. Is this any different from our elected representatives raiding the social security fund and passing along to Lockheed Martin \$400 billion for the F 35, a fighter jet that can’t fly? And by the way, like St. Vincent’s hospital, the United States of America is bankrupt. It can’t liquidate its debt.

The story repeats itself. Those in control of some of New York’s most prized cultural institutions, The Art Students League, The Cooper Union, the New York Public Library, corrupted by the lure of millions betray their public trust in the service of real estate interests that threaten to cannibalize our cultural heritage.

One can look to cities around the country and see similar outcomes. Detroit, once the economic center of our country, has been abandoned and sold off. What is left is rubble and a people desperate to have a water supply, health services and food. Had the city been bombed the outcome wouldn’t have been much different. Our elected representatives look the other way. Of what use are they?

Nothing is sacred, absolutely nothing. The philistines are in charge. Our elected representatives who oversee a government where one swindle after another is considered good government. We have created a culture where anything goes and nothing is preserved in the name of the common good.

Morality, such an old fashioned term.

One blushes to introduce the word morality into polite conversation. It is such an old fashioned term, associated, perhaps, with civilizations bygone. How can we possibly be concerned with such niceties when we are under constant threat of terrorism? And shouldn’t we be availing ourselves of torture where necessary to make ourselves safe, and wouldn’t it be irresponsible to act otherwise? Across from Stuyvesant Square, in Manhattan, there is a Friends Meeting House. Over the entrance there is a banner that reads, “Torture Is A Moral Issue.” Apparently Americans need to be reminded.

A generation of Americans marginalized and overpowered by a government that it doesn’t understand and can’t change turns to violence as a source of empowerment. “American Sniper” is a recently released movie that broke all box office records. It is the story of an American soldier whose calling in life is killing “towel heads” in Iraq, 160 of them, making him the deadliest sniper in American history.

Chris Kyle, seems to have embraced his career as a serial killer and takes pride in what he is doing for his country. No where in this movie are we made to question that there is anything untoward about killing in general or killing people in their homeland, or that we are an invading army, not a troop of boy scouts removing trash from the side of a highway.

Our elected representatives have created a culture of killing that has been embraced by a large segment of our society, with the President of the United States as one of its principle cheerleaders. He has a kill list that is drawn on by drone operators to cut down victims in countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq. Sometimes there is “collateral damage.” A wedding party, children, the elderly, a pregnant woman are cut down in the name of democracy.

Killing is what it is all about, killing without regret, killing with pride, killing without consequences. The ICC (International Criminal Court) is a court system that began functioning in 2002. Its purpose is to prosecute those who violate international law by committing genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes. 123 countries signed on. The court sits in the Hague, in the Netherlands. Our elected representatives chose not to join, thus giving a clear signal that they planned to act outside the law.

And further, in 2002, our elected representatives passed the “American Service Members Protection Act,” nicknamed “The Hague Invasion Act.” This piece of legislation authorizes the use of military force to liberate any American or citizen of a U.S.-allied country being held by the court. Of course, “service members” is a euphemism for figures like George Bush and Dick Cheney who might well be tried and convicted for their violations of international law.

“American Service Members Protection Act” is a confession of guilt. It wouldn’t have been passed if there weren’t real fears of legal consequence for unjustifiable acts of war. But what it reveals more than anything is the thugism of our elected representatives, the shameless devotion to violence, the shameless disavowal of any moral code, the complete lack of honor. “We can kill anyone, anywhere. And if you get in our way, we will kill you.” This is the United States of America in the 21st century.

Chickens come home to roost

It should come as no surprise that local police forces are now military outposts. The Pentagon and the Department of Homeland Security have already shunted \$5.1 billion worth of military equipment to local police departments around the country. This equipment includes armored personnel carriers, assault rifles, land-mine detectors, grenade launchers, and 94,000 machine guns.

SWAT teams, in full military regalia, are raiding people’s homes in the middle of the night, often just to search for drugs. People have died. Pets have been shot. Homes have been ravaged. All in the name of keeping us safe. One family in Atlanta was awakened in the middle of the night when officers burst into their home and threw a flashbang grenade into the playpen where a toddler was sleeping. Civilians, — especially black ones — have become target practice.

This is trickle down fascism. What happens at the top happens at the bottom. The top gets to be the top every time we vote in elections and install our elected representatives, the ones who underwrite the fascist state we are living in.

Our electoral system — with a few exceptions — attracts the lowest element in society, raises them to the position of ultimate power, which they then use to enrich themselves and their corporate sweethearts, while simultaneously fleecing us and undermining the very basis for social existence. If national and international law were enforced many of our elected representatives would be led off in handcuffs to spend the last of their days in prison.

Our elected representatives are drawn from amongst those who have no trouble lying and selling out to the highest bidder. Their conduct sets the moral tone for the rest of society. The most degraded use of power is pushed to the front. There is a mass culture that dips ever deeper into a pool of tawdry self-abasement. We owe all of this to the form of government we live under and to its capacity to select the most slavish of men and women to rule over us.

Quiet Despair

What does it mean to live in such a society for those millions of us who care about human life and the fate of the planet? What does it mean to us when we see our neighbors struggling to pay their rent, having lost their pension and their savings to the Wall Street bankers thanks to legislation that our elected representatives put in place? What does it mean to be betrayed again and again by those we put in power, to be lied to again and again? What happens to our identity and self-respect when we know we are allowing the swindle and rapine to continue by acquiescing to the *cosa nostra* euphemistically referred to as “American Democracy.”

We are made to feel small and powerless. We lack a solid grounding in reality. Reality is something we don’t want to know. It is too frightening, so we kid ourselves into believing that everything is okay. We dare not look into the future. We dread what it might hold. We are cut off from each other. Our fear and insecurity create barriers. Our conversations are trivial and manic. Honest, in depth conversations would take us where we don’t want to go.

We are being crushed by an oppressive government, presided over by the elected representatives we install every time we vote. It would never occur to us that the depression we experience is a consequence of the quiet despair that ensues from a sense of impending disaster and the feeling of powerlessness that accompanies it.

What is it like for our young people starting out in life? How can they have an honest vision of the future that carries some hope with it? They are saddled with student debt from which there is no escape. They are lucky if the degree they worked so hard for will get them a low paying job. What does the future hold for them? Not much, so they drown themselves in a sea of extreme drinking and random sex.

Says, Russell Brand,

“We are living in a zoo, ... our collective consciousness, our individual consciousness, has been hijacked by a power structure that needs us to remain atomized and disconnected. We want union, we want connection, we need it the way we need other forms of nutrition, and denied it we delve into the lower impulses for sanctuary.”

The “me” generation is self-centered and blinded to the reality that surrounds them, a

reality that is in a state of terminal decay. “Me” is all that is left to hold onto. Here is Russell at his lyrical best.

Is there an emptiness in you as you walk your land, uneasy feet on uneasy streets, uneasy in the bedroom, uneasy even in the mirror, an uneasy creep to uneasy sleep, pulling the bed sheets up close; checking your phone, checking your phone, checking you’re not here all alone to die alone?

These are dark times. We get on with our lives, put on a good face, have a few beers, a few laughs, enjoy some theatre, a good meal, a movie, some music. We do our best to keep ourselves energized, spirited and hopeful about life. But, we spend our days waiting, waiting for a magical savior, waiting for the worst.

By this time I hope you are wondering, “Well, is there no way out? Is there no alternative to the form of government we are enslaved to?”

To which I reply, “Indeed there is. And it is called sortition.”

Sortition

Sortition is another word for lottery, allotment, lot. Drop some names into a hat. Pull one out — without peeking — and that person wins the prize. The appeal of sortition is that it is fair. It establishes a level playing field. Everyone has the same equal opportunity.

In ancient Athens, sortition was used for selecting magistrates — about 1,100 of them — and the Council of 500 or boule, which was responsible for setting the agenda for the Assembly. Magistrates were executive administrators. In Athens they oversaw the grain supply, building projects, trade. The equivalent today might be Parks Commissioner, School Chancellor.

Any Athenian who met citizenship and age requirements could put forward his name a year in advance. If his name was drawn he would serve for one year. Before entering service the candidate was interviewed, just to make sure that there were no glaring deficiencies that might disqualify him from office.

One could argue that those who offered themselves for service might know little or nothing about their particular responsibility. That contingency was addressed by having a committee of several citizens oversee each function, with the assumption that what one person didn’t know another would make up for. Tenure was limited to one year. There were frequent reviews of a magistrate’s performance. If a majority of the review jury felt his performance was inadequate the magistrate was replaced.

The Athenians believed in amateurism. They believed that the average citizen was wise enough and intelligent enough to acquit himself of his duties adequately. Their bigger concern was concentration of power, abuse of power and corruption, which was why they used sortition for selecting magistrates. Only generals and persons responsible for large sums of money were voted into office.

Today, our jury system is based on sortition. It is assumed that a random sampling of the citizenry will result in a jury that will act wisely in forming its judgment. When there are limited places for a certain benefit, for example in a college program, or to run a marathon, names are submitted for sortition. Those whose number is drawn win the prize.

Sortition around the world

Currently there is renewed interest in using sortition, as opposed to elections, as a means of selecting people for government service. There are various proposals afloat. Books and articles are being written. There are movements in several countries to actually put sortition into practice. “Equality by lot” is a blog devoted exclusively to a discussion of sortition, attended mainly by academics. It is a useful resource if one wants to keep up to date about what is happening in the world of sortition.

Recently, in London, a new campaign (see occupydemocracy.net) was launched to demand government by sortition in England. In Mexico, the “National Regeneration Movement (Morena)” will select its candidates for congressional seats by sortition. Louis Laurent, a Belgian MP, is calling for a citizen parliament selected by sortition. Recently there was an article in a Chilean publication advocating sortition. Sortition has been promoted by the Newid Party in Wales (see ordinarypeople.org.uk). David Van Reybrouck, a Belgian historian, has written a book (in Dutch) entitled, *Against Elections* (see policy-network.net for an excerpt in English) in which he advocates a bi-representative government, half elected, half selected by sortition.

In Australia, the New Democracy Foundation (newdemocracy.com.au) is experimenting with “demarchy,” a form of government based in a network of numerous decision-making groups. Each group deals with a specific function, i.e. transport, land use, parks. Membership of each group is chosen randomly (i.e. by sortition) each year from all those interested in a specific topic.

In Iceland the citizenry, not their representatives, were called upon to write a new constitution. The parliament appointed a constitutional committee of seven to work together with a national assembly comprised of 950 citizens, drawn randomly (sortition) from the national registry, and a constituent assembly where 25 individuals were elected out of a roster of 522 candidates of all backgrounds and political affiliations. Over the course of four months, the committee consulted various experts and ordinary citizens to inform the bill, bringing it to a national referendum in late-2012. Sixty-seven per cent of the electorate voted in favor of the constitutional bill. Yet the political establishment succeeded in defeating its adoption.

What about here in the U. S. of A., the alleged home to democracy, free thought and good government, what can we add to the stew? Well, just suppose that instead of choosing our candidates for national office by means of primaries and party caucuses we use sortition. What would that be like?

The first thing to understand is that elections in the United States— national as well as local — are under the purview of state governments. Thus there are fifty different election laws with endless variations in definitions and details, the kinds of voting machines, security measures, controls over party organization, financial matters, etc.

The New York State Election Law makes provision for elections in the smallest of localities. It also provides for the election of national office holders.

ARTICLE 12—PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORS AND FEDERAL ELECTED OFFICERS

Title Section

- I. Presidential and Vice Presidential Electors 12-100
- II. United States Senators 12-200
- III. Representatives in Congress 12-300

The federal government has almost no say, though every so often the national government takes a principled stance that is supposed to be applied nation wide to all fifty states. For example, the "Voting Rights Act of 1965" prohibits racial discrimination in voting. But such critical issues as the procedures for designating and nominating individuals for elected office are completely in the hands of each state government.

For example in Iowa, "The term "political party" shall mean a party which, at the last preceding general election, cast for its candidate for president of the United States or for governor, as the case may be, at least two percent of the total vote cast for all candidates for that office at that election." In New York, "The term "party" means any political organization which at the last preceding election for governor polled at least fifty thousand votes for its candidate for governor." The Texas Election Law makes repeated reference to "party" but offers no definition.

Smoke and mirrors

If it is our goal to reform our government, i.e. modify the structures that determine the power dynamics, then we must get our fingers into the dough. The place to start is Election Law, state by state.

Article I, Section 1:

No member of this state shall be disfranchised, or deprived of any of the rights or privileges secured to any citizen thereof, unless by the law of the land, or the judgment of his or her peers, except that the legislature may provide that there shall be no primary election held to nominate candidates for public office or to elect persons to party positions for any political party or parties in any unit of representation of the state from which such candidates or persons are nominated or elected whenever there is no contest or contests for such nominations or election as may be prescribed by general law.

What the Lord giveth, he taketh back. No one "shall be disfranchised" ... except if the "law of the land" says he says he is, or his peers decide so. What meaning can such a "right" possibly have? That the election law prescribes that there shall be no primary elections when offices are not contested gives testimony to the corruption of the system. Uncontested elections are the rule. Why? What is wrong with the system that the same person gets returned to office, again and again?

Article I, Section 8:

All laws creating, regulating or affecting boards or officers charged with the duty of qualifying voters, or of distributing ballots to voters, or of receiving, recording or counting votes at elections, shall secure equal representation of the two political parties which, at the general election next preceding that for which such boards or officers are to serve, cast the highest and the next highest number of votes. All such boards and officers shall be appointed or elected in such manner, and upon the nomination of such representatives of said parties respectively, as the legislature may direct.

Again, that mind-numbing legalese! Nowhere is there any mention of the fact that our system of elections is under the control of two political parties that are run in secrecy by some of the most venal, power hungry and morally bankrupt men in the country and that these two parties have this country and therefore the world in a death grip that is legitimized by the very election law that fails to even mention their existence. The words "Democrats" or "Republicans" are never once mentioned.

Article 6 is entitled, "Designation and Nomination of candidates." Section 6-102 declares, "Party nominations of candidates for the office of elector of president and vice president of the United States, one for each congressional district and two at large, shall be made by the state committee." This is simple prose that conceals more than it reveals. For herein is contained the key to our whole system of government, i.e. who gets to be in power and by what means. "Shall be made," passive construction. Who is/are the agent/s? If we go back to the beginning here is what we learn.

In a nutshell

Article I, Section 104 is called, "Definitions." Here we get to the crux of the matter, sort of.

I, 1. "The term 'political unit' means the state or any political subdivision thereof or therein." Clear enough.

I, 2. "The term 'unit of representation' means any political unit from which members of any committee or delegates to a party convention shall be elected as provided in this chapter." Not so clear. You have to go to four years of law school to learn how to write this way. When language is obscure, it is because there is something to hide.

So it appears that a "unit of representation" is a committee, a committee at the county level would mean, I assume, voters who reside in a particular county and have organized themselves for purposes of "representation." They "represent" their county, but in what context and for what purpose? Or else "unit of representation" can mean "delegates to a party convention." Party convention is nowhere defined or given an official presence. And further "delegates" is in the plural. In what way does it constitute a "unit" of representation?

I, 3. "The term 'party' means any political organization which at the last preceding election for governor polled at least fifty thousand votes for its candidate for governor." So "party" is a "political organization." How constituted and under whose aegis, by what authority and for what purpose? No answer to these critical questions.

"Party" is defined by the fact that a certain "political organization" got a certain number of votes in a prior election. A more meaningful definition might read, "A political party is an organization formed for the purpose of gaining power for its members as a means to self-enrichment, and winning a position of influence in government as a means of realizing its particular political ideology." Obviously this is not the kind of straight shooting one can expect to find in a system whose primary goal is to obscure its true purpose.

I, 6. "The term 'committee' means any committee chosen, in accordance with the provisions of this chapter, to represent the members of a party in any political unit." It would appear that a "committee" is a group of party members representing their party, represent for what purpose?

The whole megillah

I, 7. "The term 'designation' means any method in accordance with the provisions of this chapter by which candidates for party nomination for public office or for election to party position may be named for the purpose of any primary election." Now this is it friends, the whole megillah, the whole nine yards, keg of beer or whatever you choose. The earth turns on its axis or fails to based on how we determine the "designation" of candidates.

Note the critical difference between "designation" and "nomination." We, the sheeple of New York State, nominate the candidates by voting in primary elections. We determine who will hold office, don't we? Not! We vote for candidates that are "designated," i.e. chosen, by others, party bosses, operating in secrecy, using "any method" they choose. The key phrase is "may be named." Named by whom, under what circumstances?

Thus it is that power brokers with no accountability to any public constituency have the real power, the only power that matters and they are bought and sold by the corporate interests who are hell bent on destroying our habitat for private gain. This is what we want to change.

Those who designate have the real power. All the rest is poppycock, balderdash, falderal. All those specifications, rules and regulations etc. are what is known as smoke and mirrors. The only thing that matters is how candidates are designated, by whom and under what circumstances and for what purpose.

I, 9. "The terms 'primary' or 'primary election' mean only the mandated election at which enrolled members of a party may vote for the purpose of nominating party candidates and electing party officers." That is straight forward enough. It is straight forward because it doesn't matter. It doesn't hide anything. The hiding has already taken place.

I, 24. "The term 'major political parties' means the two parties which polled for their respective candidates for the office of governor the highest and next highest number of votes at the last preceding election for such office." Another critical definition. Under what circumstance and by whom was it decided that this country should be run by "two" "major political parties?" Why not three, or six?

I, 28. "The term 'caucus' shall mean an open meeting held in a political subdivision to nominate the candidates of a political party for public office to be elected in such subdivision at which all the enrolled voters of such party residing in such subdivision are eligible to vote." Now here I am a bit confused. I thought the primary was the opportunity to nominate candidates. The "caucus" sounds like a means of "designating" rather than "nominating." Perhaps the key phrase is "political subdivision," meaning selecting candidates for local office, rather than statewide or national office. I am ready to be corrected.

Article 2 of the New York State Election Law is entitled, "Party Organization." What is interesting about all of this is that no where in the Election Law that I can find is it ever declared: "State and national government shall be under the control of the two dominant political parties." It is just assumed. The Election Law describes how the party shall function on the state and local level. It does not allow for the party's existence, nor does it specifically empower the party to run the country, which it does. All of this is accomplished by slight of hand.

We learn how party committees are to be created, how party positions are to be filled, that parties are to set up rules of governance and procedures for removing a committee

member. Section 124 of

Article 2 sets the rules for party names and emblems. We learn that

The name of a party shall be in the English language and shall not include the words “American”, “United States”, “National”, “New York State”, “Empire State”, or any abbreviation thereof, nor the name or part of the name, or an abbreviation of the name, of an existing party. The emblem chosen may be a star, an animal, an anchor, or any other proper symbol, but may not be the same as or similar to any emblem, insignia, symbol or flag used by any political or governmental body, agency or entity nor any religious emblem, insignia, symbol or flag, nor the portrait of any person, nor the representation of a coin or of the currency of the United States. The name and emblem chosen shall not be similar to or likely to create confusion with the name or emblem of any other existing party or independent body.

Well, there you have it. If you are thinking of setting up a “major political party,” you should be aware that donkey and elephant are already taken and therefore off limits. What about dinosaur, or a viper of some kind?

Change

Change is scary. Not changing is terrifying. The United States, the World, cannot continue on their current trajectory if survival is the goal. Our only hope is government transformation. And it is quite possible. Those who scream the loudest about change being impossible are usually those who have something to lose when change takes place. Change is constant. It is inevitable. The only questions are what change will take place and who will direct it. Russell Brand’s inimitable reply to those who say, “the system is not perfect, but it is the best we can do:” “It’s fucked,” he says, “and it’s fucking us, and it’s obsolete.”

Politics is about power. Government is people in power. Change who gets into power and how they get there and you have changed government. “The change you speak of is not possible. They are in our way.” It is not they who are in our way. It is we who are in our way. “We are like a swarm of battered spouses,” says Brand, “unable to believe that a better world is out there, because we’re cowering and flinching and reaching out for stinking trinkets.” Once we understand that we are the problem, we are more than half way towards our goal. “Quickly you realize that your job is to negotiate with your own ego.”

As Brand points out, the power elite have complete control.

They own both the teams that are competing, the stadium they play, the grass they play on, and we’re the ball they’re kicking around. They have removed all possibility for reform or redirection within the system; the change must come from us. Our only hope of survival is to overthrow their structures and take our power back.

The good news is that we have found our Archimedean lever that will change who owns what, the lever that will move the earth, and moving the earth is rather easy once you have your lever. Our lever is sortition. Instead of party bosses horse trading away our future, we use sortition. Candidates are designated to run for higher office — President, Vice President, Senate and the House of Representatives — based on random selection, that is to say a system based in political equality, a system free from bullying and corruption. Here is how it would work.

Phase I: Our first intervention will be at the state level. There will be an amendment to the Election Law substituting sortition for party caucus. It can read as follows:

Citizens will be designated to run for higher office — Representative, Senator, Vice President, and President — by means of sortition, overseen by a randomly selected jury of five hundred. Candidates interested in running for these offices will submit their names a year in advance. Juries and submissions will be statewide for Senator and President. Juries and submissions for the House of Representatives will be drawn from their respective, local election districts.

The jury of five hundred will create a standardized application form and vet the submitted applications. Six names will be randomly drawn from the pool of accepted applicants for each office. These selected candidates will be vetted and interviewed by the jury of five hundred. If a majority of the jury deems a candidate unacceptable, his/her name will be withdrawn and there will be a new sortition to determine a replacement. The final six names will constitute the ballot entries for the national election. This sortition process will be repeated at the end of each completed term in office and will be overseen by a new, randomly selected jury.

Well, how does it sound, scary, interesting, challenging, reckless? Randomness might seem a risky way to choose our national leaders. But remember that there will be a jury of five hundred overseeing the process and weeding out those who might be inappropriate. You might argue that this is rank amateurism, which it is. Amateurs, that is to say real people, grounded in social reality, who understand what it means to hold the public trust and honor it, will be a welcome relief from the crooked politicians who have had control over our destiny for the past century or two.

And once the candidates have been designated by sortition, there will be an election. The voters will have a voice. There will be six candidates to choose from. There will be a wider range of choice than our current system provides. Debates and discussions will be more intelligent and substantive. Most of the candidates will be unknown. They will make themselves known by saying something that is of value to the electorate.

Benefits of sortition

There are certain very significant advantages to this way of selecting our candidates. There are no backroom deals, favoring those with allegiance to power and big money. The citizenry at large, in all its diversity, is drawn on as a resource. There would be a dramatic reduction in corruption and corporate influence. Some people would be bought up, most not.

And further, there will be rotation in office. No longer will there be no contest “elections” where the same politicians hold office for decades, build a power base from which to enrich themselves and their buddies at the expense of the common good. There will be a continual turnover of office holders, giving citizens with new ideas and world outlooks a voice in government. Such a selection of representatives will be a lot more likely to take peace and ecology as serious issues in need of rational responses.

Candidates can choose to affiliate themselves with one of the major parties, or they can choose to remain independent. But either way, party influence will be dramatically reduced. And that is a good thing. Political parties as currently constituted are not much different from gangs. And elections are not much difference from gang warfare in suit and tie. There

is no tactic that is too low or ruthless. Human life and social welfare are not on the agenda. It is all about power and ascendancy.

Power to the idiots

So why not do away with gang warfare and use sortition to select our candidates for higher office? “Power to the idiots!,” you say. “A capitol full of clowns and cretins,” you say. “We need experts in charge. People who know what they are doing.” “A capitol full of clowns and cretins” is what we now have. The clowns and cretins are leading us into the abyss, destroying resources natural and human, decimating our ecology, killing innocents around the world and are now turning our cities into military playgrounds.

Experts at what? Secrecy, lying, manipulation, self-enrichment, war mongering? Much of the time our elected representatives don’t even read the bills they sign. They have staffers who do that for them. They are expert at getting elected and siphoning public monies to private purpose, not much else.

The primary issue is one of values, not expertise. We need people with values that favor social justice, community living and a vibrant eco-system. We need experts who are experts at being human in the highest sense of that word, who prefer peace to war, who prefer an apple orchard in blossom to a blackened battlefield strewn with corpses. We need people who have nothing to hide, people who speak the truth.

And that is right dear reader, you, I or your next door neighbor might some day become President of the United States. And that is the way it should be. Real people, with real stakes in the game should be in charge, not corporate sponsored celebrity superstars with billion dollar campaign chests. I will not stoop to mention the many embarrassments who have become President. Anyone of us could obviously do better.

We use sortition to run our court system. Jurors are called upon to review complicated matters where life and liberty are on the line. We entrust this important responsibility to a random selection of twelve of our citizenry. Why can’t we use a random selection of 500 of our citizenry to oversee who runs our government? Aristotle believed that each citizen was endowed with civic virtue, the ability to distinguish right from wrong and administer justice. For him the issue was not knowledge, as it was with Socrates, but rather character and judgment.

But our sortition does not change us from an oligarchy into a democracy. Any time we have a few hundred representatives speaking for hundreds of millions, we have oligarchy by definition. However, our new oligarchy will be vastly superior to the one we have. It will be an oligarchy that has a human face to it, an oligarchy that is responsive to its constituency and the common good.

State governments will be willing to come along because the change we speak of is being applied to national elections only, not state and local elections. Sortition will result in a redistribution of power. Power at the center will be weakened, resulting in an increase of power at the local level.

Phase II

After we have become accustomed to selecting our candidates for higher office by sortition, after we have witnessed the benefits of opening the doors to new talent and ideas, after we

have witnessed the reduction in corruption and ruthless disregard for the common weal, we might well be in the mood to do away with elections all together. They are a charade, and even under the best of circumstances entail manipulation and deception. Gaining office becomes a goal in itself and one does what one has to get there. Candidates are set up to make promises they can't keep and voters are set up to believe candidates whom they know are lying.

If we decide to eliminate elections altogether at the national level and rely exclusively on sortition to select our national leaders then we will have to amend the constitution. An amendment may be proposed either by the Congress with a two-thirds majority vote in both the House of Representatives and the Senate or by a constitutional convention called for by two-thirds of the State legislatures. Once we have a new set of office holders in the capital, where there is a constant rotation in office, and no vested interest in holding onto power, Congress might be amenable to eliminating elections and using sortition for selecting office holders. In the event that there is resistance, there is always the state route to pursue.

This change to our system of governance will not be achieved by badgering some passersby with petitions or by a blitz of TV ads. It will be achieved by a multitude of face to face small group gatherings where people become engaged in an exchange of ideas, have the opportunity to think out loud on critical matters and become involved in the struggle for political justice. People who truly understand what is wrong with the current system and become aware of what can be done to fix it will take action.

In Chapter 11 of *Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained: The True Meaning of Democracy* I discuss the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776. The people of Pennsylvania were unhappy with the way their leaders were responding to political crisis. They gathered by the thousands in the State House courtyard and set up a shadow government that eventually replaced the existing government, thus instituting the most democratic government this country has ever known.

The early phase of the French Revolution offers a similar example. On May 5, 1789, king Louis XVI called a meeting of the Estates-General. Traditionally, the three estates — the clergy, the nobility, and the commons — had met separately. This time the commons insisted that all three meet together and invited the clergy and the nobility to join them. The nobility and the clergy declined, and so the commons (the 99%) met on their own and debated.

The commons continued to meet on their own and by June 17 had given themselves the title "National Assembly" and had begun to draft a constitution. Shut out of their regular meeting place by the king, they met at a new location and took an oath not to adjourn until they had completed their constitution. The king ordered them to abandon the project. With relatively few histrionics, they persisted. Soon they were joined by the clergy, then the nobility. On June 27, Louis himself wrote formally requesting the two upper houses to merge with the lower to form a National Assembly.

After July 9, 1789, the Assembly became known as the National Constituent Assembly and continued in its deliberations despite opposition from the king. As of July 14, 1789, it became the effective government of France. On September 3, 1791, after two years of deliberation, the Assembly adopted France's first written constitution.

There is no reason why we can't emulate these important examples from history. It will take

a lot of us. If three thousand people think sortition is an interesting idea and let it drop, then obviously nothing new happens. If each of the same three thousand passes it on to five people and those five pass it on to another five, the outcome, according to my online permutation calculator is 242,190,944,550,072,000. I think this number reads 242 quadrillion, 190 trillion, 944 billion, 550 million, 72 thousand. That ought to do it.

P.S. With our new government in place there will be an American Renaissance. We will once again be proud to be American and once again we will be an inspiration to countries around the world hungry for new ideas.

Arthur D. Robbins is the author of, "PARADISE LOST, PARADISE REGAINED: THE TRUE MEANING OF DEMOCRACY" referred to by Ralph Nader as, "An eye-opening, earth-shaking book . . . a fresh, torrential shower of revealing insights and vibrant lessons . . ." and the e-book based on Part II of "PARADISE LOST" entitled, "DEMOCRACY DENIED: THE UNTOLD STORY." To learn more visit acropolis-newyork.com

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